

MINUTES OF THE WORK SESSION  
CITY COUNCIL OF CREST HILL  
WILL COUNTY, ILLINOIS  
August 25, 2025

The August 25, 2025, the City Council work session was called to order by Mayor Raymond R. Soliman at 7:00 p.m. in the Council Chambers, 20600 City Center Blvd. Crest Hill, Will County, Illinois.

The following Council members were present: Mayor Raymond Soliman, City Clerk Christine Vershay-Hall, City Treasurer Jamie Malloy, Alderman Scott Dyke, Alderman Darrell Jefferson, Alderwoman Claudia Gazal, Alderperson Tina Oberlin, Alderman Mark Cipiti, Alderman Nate Albert, Alderman Joe Kubal.

Also Present were: City Administrator Blaine Wing, City Engineer Ron Wiedeman, Interim Public Works Director Julius Hansen, Building Commissioner Don Seeman, City Attorney Mike Stiff.

Absent were: Alderman Angelo Deserio, Police Chief Ed Clark, Finance Director Glenn Gehrke, Community & Economic Development Director Daniel Ritter, Community Development Consultant Ron Mentzer, Interim Human Resource Manager Dave Strahl.

**TOPIC: Ordinance to Replace the Grocery Tax Effective 1/1/2026**

City Administrator Blaine Wing began by providing background on the topic, explaining that when he started approximately two and a half months ago, the previous Interim Administrator had already been working on this topic for Council's consideration. He noted that he had followed up with the City Attorney and adjusted the draft ordinance accordingly. Administrator Wing reminded the Council and audience that the Governor will be sunsetting the grocery tax as of the conclusion of this year but allows municipalities, if we act prior to October first, to implement a replacement at the local level for this grocery tax.

Administrator Wing reported that over 474 municipalities had already passed similar ordinances, with that list continuing to grow, and these ordinances are forwarded to the State. He emphasized the financial impact for us has been estimated the overall tax and revenue would bring in about \$400,000.00. Administrator Wing commented that after consulting with the State, they determined their initial estimate was too low, and while they do not have a precise number, it could potentially reach \$450,000.00. He also pointed out that if we another grocery store comes to Crest Hill, we would want this in place already.

Administrator Wing expressed his goal is to have a Council decision before the October 1st deadline, preferably at the September 2nd meeting, to provide sufficient time to notify the State that Crest Hill would be joining the other communities implementing a replacement tax.

Administrator Wing was asked whether he had an answer to a question about Joliet's approach, he acknowledged he had not been able to follow up with the City of Joliet directly but noted important information from their website regarding the grocery tax's impact on individuals using SNAP benefits. He then explained that this does not impact

that when they are using the snap card, which exempts that one percent for the items that are normally taxed the one percent.

Mayor Soliman clarified an important point stating that this would not be an additional tax. This is just keeping its status quo that it has always been, and nobody will see any changes. Administrator Wing confirmed this by explaining that State tax will go through December 31<sup>st</sup> and the next day, January 1st, the local tax, which is the same percentage, would kick in.

City Attorney Mike Stiff then provided additional historical context about the ordinance's development. He explained that they had an initial work session shortly after the IML (Illinois Municipal League) conference last year, where the grocery tax was discussed. He noted that several municipalities had passed similar ordinances last year, which are sitting in Springfield on file with the Department of Revenue waiting for January 1, 2026, to start. Attorney Stiff also explained that there had been previous discussions with Interim Administrator Graff about whether Crest Hill could implement a different retailer's tax instead, but it was determined that the City already has a retailers' occupation tax that was passed by referendum several years ago.

Attorney Stiff detailed the evolution of the current draft ordinance, stating the difference is he has added where it will go if passed in the code.

With no further questions from Council, Mayor Soliman confirmed the item would be placed on the agenda for the following meeting.

**TOPIC: Resolution Approving an Agreement for Professional Design/Construction Services for 2024 Sanitary Sewer Cleaning and Televising for Lining Priority Areas 4 and 5 by and Between the City of Crest Hill, Will County, Illinois and Robinson Engineering, Ltd. For an amount of \$35,960.00**

City Engineer Ron Wiedeman explained that this contract represented the follow-up to sewer videos completed the previous year. He noted that at the last meeting, Council had approved additional sewer televising for the remainder of the trunk sewer that goes from our diversion structure that is just west of Oakland Avenue back to the west plant. This new contract addressed areas identified in last year's work that needed additional attention, either lining or repair work.

Engineer Wiedeman directed Council's attention to an exhibit starting on page 34 of their packet, explaining the color-coding system. He explained that blue is good and means priority one and not a lot of work. He then walked through the specific problem areas, noting that we have a segment under Weber Road that we would like to get repaired and pointing out areas of orange and red coloring as they approached Broadway and the west plant, indicating more significant issues.

Engineer Wiedeman clarified the scope of work stating most sections will just be lined and there are a couple of them that must be pulled up and replaced and some structures, manholes will be adjusted. Engineer Wiedeman estimated the construction cost at half a million dollars, and he is seeking approval only for the design work at this time for \$35,960.00.

Mayor Soliman confirmed the item would be placed on the agenda for the following meeting.

**TOPIC: West STP Change Order No. 9**

Interim Public Works Director Julius Hansen presented Change Order No. 9 for the West Treatment Plant construction. He explained that there were ten sub-items within this change order involving construction work at the West Plant. Interim Director Hansen emphasized that this work has been done and needs approval for spending the \$127,228.00 on these change orders.

Interim Director Hansen assured the Council that the work was done to keep the progress the going and importantly the scheduled completion date does not change because of these change orders. Interim Director Hansen also mentioned that Strand Engineering had reviewed all the attached documents, which he acknowledged were extensive, and that Dominic from Strand was present at the meeting to answer any questions about the detailed paperwork.

After a brief presentation with no questions from Council members, Mayor Soliman conducted an informal vote for the pay request change order #9 in the amount of \$127,228.00.

AYES: Ald. Oberlin, Cipiti, Albert, Kubal, Dyke, Jefferson, Gazal.

NAYES: None.

ABSENT: None.

Mayor Soliman confirmed the item would be placed on the agenda for the following meeting.

**TOPIC: Tree Planting Program**

Interim Public Works Director Julius Hansen presented the annual tree planting program. He began by explaining that the program's purpose is to plant trees for residents that request the trees. This program is to beautify the City.

Interim Director Hansen detailed how Public Works collaborate with The Fields, noting this program is done annually and The Fields does a great job.

Interim Director Hansen commented that we would be able to plant thirty-seven trees with the City providing 50% of the cost and the residents providing the other 50%. He mentioned that in the previous year they planted approximately twenty trees on private property, and if participation remained similar, they would plant the remaining trees in the right of way along the street on City property until we exhaust the budget of \$6,000.00.

A significant discussion emerged when Alderperson Oberlin pointed out that the documentation stated, "no tree will be planted in the parkway," which conflicted with past practice. Alderperson Oberlin stated emphatically, "All 3 of my trees in my parkway were from this program. So has that changed unbeknownst to me?" Interim Director Hansen initially indicated the program was strict for private property, but Alderwoman Gazal insisted that they always open it to the parkways.

This led to a productive clarification discussion. Interim Director Hansen acknowledged the confusion stating this is why we are bringing it to the Council because he is told one thing, and the Council tells him another. He agreed to modify the approach, stating that the residents can have it in their parkway or on private property if that would be what the Council would like to do. However, some parkways are not appropriate.

The Council then discussed parkway width requirements, with members recalling that parkways needed to be at least six feet wide to accommodate trees, noting that the east end is three feet by three quarters. So those parkways would not be, and we would exhaust all the wide parkway locations before we would even think about anything that was minimal.

Administrator Wing added that if the Council agreed that evening, they could immediately advertise the program on social media and the website stating, details coming, then add full details after the Council officially act at the September 2nd meeting.

Alderman Dyke asked if we have done any valve exercising, Interim Public Works Director Julius Hansen provided an update. He confirmed they have a contractor, ME Simpson, exercising valves throughout the City with good success.

Mayor Soliman confirmed that this would be on the agenda for the following meeting.

Mayor Soliman asked for Council's concurrence to deviate from the agenda order to address item 9, Holiday Lights on City Hall.

**TOPIC: Holiday Lights on City Hall**

Building Commissioner Don Seeman presented the proposal for permanent holiday lighting for the exterior of the City Center and the Police Department.

Commissioner Seeman began by providing financial context stating in years past, the City has paid around \$6,000.00 for the white lights. These lights are up for forty days from the Friday after Thanksgiving until January 6<sup>th</sup>. He explained that they had obtained three proposals for permanent lighting solutions.

Commissioner Seeman methodically reviewed each proposal, starting with Night Lights, the low bidder at \$29,330.00. However, he expressed concerns about this bid because there is a contingency on the City giving this contractor a five-star Google rating to receive the \$4,000.00 discount and recommending their company to other municipalities. He noted additional concerns including only a 2-year warranty, confusion about building measurements that could result in additional charges, and limited training options. Commissioner Seeman explained that if there is any deviation from the measurements, we would be charged per foot for anything extra from this contractor.

The second contractor, Bright House Lighting, and their bid was \$31,392.00 (reduced from \$35,721 after eliminating the lower west side portion). Commissioner Seeman expressed reservations about their approach since they would be invasive with our electricity and put sub panels in.

The third contractor, Vivid Lights from Manhattan, bid amount was \$32,647.54.00. Commissioner Seeman highlighted several advantages and stated that they do everything.

All the transformers are exterior up in the soffit, hidden wires, hidden connectors. He emphasized their superior warranty of fifteen years with three years' service for any free service calls. The price included the lower part of the west elevation and would cover from the south end of the west elevation all the way around the buildings, all the way through the sally port to the end of the Police Station on the east side, the northeast corner.

Commissioner Seeman concluded with his professional recommendation that he believes Vivid Lighting is the most qualified contractor. He commented that he understands it is not the low bid, but sometimes the low bid is not the best bid. You are not getting apples for apples.

Administrator Wing supported Commissioner Seeman's analysis, explaining his initial motivation for exploring permanent lighting instead of having the plastic components year-round. He also highlighted that with year-round lighting we could change the colors of the lights for certain events, such as the Police Departments upcoming event and do blue and white. He noted the system would be internet-based with different zones and preset animations.

Administrator Wing also mentioned that Vivid had offered a ten percent discount, bringing their price from \$36,275.04 to \$32,647.54. He agreed with Commissioner Seeman's assessment, stating that despite being about \$1,000.00 more than one competitor he stated that we are getting the full package compared to having a portion removed, and Vivid is the one that I also would be recommending.

Council members asked several questions about warranty details and transformer locations. When asked about visibility when lights are off, Administrator Wing explained there would be very minimal visibility in the soffit.

Alderman Albert commented that the fact that this company has a fifteen-year warranty is why he would even consider this company. Attorney Stiff commented that he objected to Night Lights' requirement for a guaranteed 5-star Google review. Alderman Albert commented that it is a nice strategy on their part, but no thanks.

A significant discussion arose when Alderman Jefferson identified contradictory warranty language in the documentation.

The discussion concluded with agreement to move forward with Vivid Lights, with staff promising to visit some of their existing installations before the September 2nd meeting.

#### **TOPIC: Consent Agenda Discussion**

Administrator Blaine Wing introduced the consent agenda discussion, referencing materials in the Council packet starting on page 110. He explained that staff had researched what neighboring communities were doing with their City agendas and work sessions, focusing on communities using the same agenda software and website vendor to ensure a seamless transition.

Administrator Wing explained the concept stating that items on consent are considered routine by one motion. These items will not be separately discussed unless an Alderperson so requests, in which event the item would be removed from the consent item and then it

would be discussed or considered separately. He noted that many communities require two Council members to pull an item, but his recommendation was that any single Council member could request an item be pulled for discussion.

Administrator Wing walked through a sample regular Council meeting agenda, highlighting key changes including public comment in two spots - one before the consent agenda specifically for agenda items, and another at the end for general comments. He explained this would allow anybody from the public to comment so that before Council would even talk about the items, the public would be able to comment.

Using a hypothetical example, Administrator Wing stated that if five items were on consent and a Council member wanted to pull item B, to discuss they could and it could be for various reasons then the remaining items would be approved as a group, then the pulled item would be discussed separately.

Aldерwoman Gazal questioned the purpose, asking "How are you supposed to understand or explain it to the public?" noting that work sessions are not televised. Administrator Wing explained that the consent agenda would speed up Council meetings by avoiding rehashing discussions from work sessions, estimating most communities save about an hour per meeting.

Alderman Jefferson shared concerns based on experience in another township where "things changed from the work session to the meeting and a lot of Council members was acquiesced to things that weren't actually discussed on the work session." They requested copies of work session minutes before regular meetings to ensure accuracy. Administrator Wing acknowledged this concern but noted the timing challenge with only approximately five working days between meetings.

Clerk Vershay-Hall commented that sometimes there are staffing issues, or too many meetings at one time between work session, regular meetings and plan commission meetings and the minutes get backed up, especially if they are long meetings. She also commented that if a set of draft minutes is not done it would not make the consent agenda for approval.

The discussion touched on voting procedures, with Administrator Wing clarifying that any member wanting to vote no or abstain on a specific item would need to pull it from consent for individual consideration. He emphasized that items generating significant discussion at work sessions would not be placed on consent agendas.

City Attorney provided examples of what would typically go on consent versus regular discussion items, noting that controversial items like the Lockport Township Fire Department Training Facility would not be one that would of went on consent agenda.

Administrator Wing concluded by proposing next steps stating that he would suggest including a couple links to other communities with his Friday update. He then commented that he would also have the staff put that current agenda into what the new template would be like. He indicated this would allow for one more workshop discussion before implementation, which would take 3-4 weeks with their current software.

### **TOPIC: Public Comment Policy & Procedure**

Administrator Blaine Wing briefly addressed this agenda item, apologizing that due to his workload, he had not been able to follow up with the City Attorney regarding the public comment policy and procedure. He mentioned that the attorney had provided background information on discussions the Council had in 2022 and 2024, but they needed more time for follow-up meetings. The item was tabled to a future workshop.

### **TOPIC: Closed Session Policy Discussion**

Like the previous item, Administrator Wing explained he had not had time to fully prepare this discussion item. He noted the attorney had provided background information, but they had not had time for necessary follow-up discussions. This item was also tabled to a future workshop.

### **TOPIC: Winter Fest 2025**

Administrator Wing provided a brief update on Winter Fest 2025, asking the Council to save the date of Saturday, December 6<sup>th</sup> is the Winter Fest, starting at 3 pm. He mentioned they were recommending a revised parade route and would provide more information including a sample flyer and map at a future meeting.

Alderwoman Gazal has been working on sponsorships and reported that she started sending out the sponsorship flyer and making some emails for sponsorship. They discussed the sponsorship process, with Administrator Wing and the Mayor offering to help provide email contacts. The Council member suggested that sponsorship funds could potentially help offset the cost of the new holiday lights. A flyer was created by staff member Marybel on Friday to support sponsorship efforts.

### **TOPIC: Discussion – Recommending Approving a Public Works Director Recruitment Firm**

Administrator Blaine Wing presented information on two finalist recruitment firms for the Public Works Director position, which are Local Gov Staffing Solutions and Arndt Municipal Support. He distributed a comparison sheet highlighting key differences including years in business, experience, candidate guarantees, and costs.

Administrator Wing reviewed the details stating that Local Gov Staffing Solutions offered their services for \$17,100.00 with a 60-day candidate guarantee and a ten percent discount on all services through December 31, 2026. Arndt Municipal Support bid \$21,000 with a 365-day candidate guarantee. Neither firm included advertising costs (estimated at \$700.00-750.00) or candidate travel expenses. Both firms received positive references.

When asked about the candidate guarantee, Administrator Wing explained that both firms will guarantee that the person who is selected for the first one, for up to two months, is here. If for any reason that person either resigns or gets terminated, they would do the whole search process minus the advertising and any travel again. He noted that while sixty days should be sufficient to determine if an employee will work out, the one-year guarantee from Arndt provided additional security.

Administrator Wing offered his recommendation stating that he liked the first firm and the price is the lower price, but he thinks either firm would do a good job for us.

Council members overwhelmingly supported Administrator Wing's recommendation. Mayor Soliman commented that Lori Peterson from Local Gov was passionate about what she does and 'hungry' and was willing to go that extra mile. Mayor Soliman stated that he would vote for her.

Alderman Dyke commented that he appreciated her efficient approach and liked that she does not want to waste time on the extra interviews because you will lose candidates while going through the entire process.

Alderman Jefferson noted commented that he liked Lori Peterson, as well, since she was very precise and gave an actual time frame when she would have a candidate ready and he likes her price. He also stated that the term separated usually means under any terminology that is used to separate from the hiring company, which would cover resignation, discharged, and termination.

With strong consensus for Local Gov Staffing Solutions and Lori Peterson, Administrator Wing confirmed he would verify that "separated" covers both termination and resignation and would place the item on the upcoming agenda. He also offered to check if Lori Peterson wanted to attend the meeting.

**PUBLIC COMMENTS:**

Stuart Soifer approached the podium and asked for more clarification on the public comment section in the beginning of the agenda. Administrator Wing explained that the public comment section at the beginning of the agenda would be for any agenda items and the public comment section at the end of the meeting would be for anything else that may not be on the agenda, but the audience wanted to make a comment.

**MAYOR UPDATES:**

Mayor Soliman had nothing to report.

**COMMITTEE/LIAISON UPDATES:**

There were no committee/liaison updates.

**CITY ADMINISTRATOR UPDATES:**

City Administrator Blaine had nothing to report besides the items he had already addressed.

There being no further business before the Council, and no action needed from the executive sessions, the meeting is adjourned.

The meeting adjourned at 8:26 PM.



Approved this \_\_\_\_ day of \_\_\_\_\_, 2025.  
As presented \_\_\_\_\_  
As amended \_\_\_\_\_

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CHRISTINE VERSHAY-HALL, CITY CLERK

\_\_\_\_\_  
RAYMOND R. SOLIMAN, MAYOR

DRAFT